

# Compassion and the Human End, *Puruṣārtha*<sup>1</sup>

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It looks as though there is a choice in commanding a degree of compassion. I say this because if someone is compassionate we praise the person as being a saint, which means that the person is very special. This is not acceptable in the Vedic culture. In its vision, everyone has to grow into a saint because *dharma* is, in itself, a *puruṣārtha*, a human end. This is not fully understood. Therefore, let us look into this in greater detail.

## ***The four human ends***

*Dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa* are the four *puruṣārthas*, the *caturvidha-puruṣārthāḥ*. By definition, that which is desired by all people is a *puruṣārtha*, *sarvaiḥ puruṣaiḥ arthyate iti puruṣārthāḥ*. It is something that is desired by all people and prayed for, *prārthyate*. *Puruṣa* means a ‘person’, implying both male and female.

### ***Mokṣa is the most important human end and it is achieved in this birth***

Among the four *puruṣārthas*, the most important, *mukhya*, is *mokṣa*. Why is that so? Let us suppose that you say *mokṣa* means not having *punarjanma*, re-birth. A lot of people would then say that they are not interested in that because they want to be reborn. When I say that *mokṣa* is right now, why should I talk of re-birth? If there is a re-birth, we will work on that too. I am very much here and would like to see that I am free enough to have a limited body, a limited mind, limited knowledge, and of course, limited money. If these constitute limitation, there is no *mokṣa* from limitations because these limitations constitute my being.

The body is limited, the mind is limited, knowledge is limited, money is limited, power is limited, and even influence is limited. Even if you become the President of the United States of America you are still subject to certain limitations. Nobody on this earth, no matter what he or she has, is really a happy person. There is always the problem of how one is going to overcome these limitations and enjoy freedom. Death may be a form of freedom, but then people say you will be reborn, so death is not freedom. You are a traveler and you will be back. Therefore, there is no such thing as *mokṣa* after death.

There are religions, which promote heaven as their ultimate goal. They are heaven-bound and they say that all of us should go to heaven. This promotion of going to heaven, is it a kind of tourism or what? Am I going there as an individual, a *jīva*? That the individual soul survives the death of the body and goes to heaven is a belief one can have. But will this soul have a body or not? If you have a body of your own, you will continue to have the same problem limitations of the body-mind-sense complex. Even if you have a heavenly body, some other heavenly body will be different from your body and there is bound to be comparison. A sense of limitation is inevitable. Further, in heaven, there would be a ruler, and you would be the ruled. Therefore, heaven is not a solution.

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If there is something called *mokṣa*, either I am free already or I can never be free. If I am free right now and here, it is only a question of knowing how. This freedom, *mokṣa*, is the *parama-puruṣārtha*, the ultimate end.

### ***Dharma is usually presented as a means which subserves the pursuits of artha and kāma***

As a *puruṣārtha*, *artha* means power, security, name and fame, etc., because they give you a sense of security. You can encash your name and fame in society, so when you consider *artha* you should also include this aspect of influence and power. Some of these things can also be viewed as *kāma* because they give you a sense of ego gratification, which is *kāma*. So *artha* becomes *kāma*. Music, food, relationships, family—all these, because they provide some satisfaction, are *kāma*. Any ego gratification, name, fame, etc., also provides this sense of satisfaction.

The *puruṣārthas* are to be understood as the means to achieve various ends. There are a number of means, *sādhanas*, for achieving these various ends. For instance, getting an education and equipping yourself professionally are the means for the pursuit of *artha-kāma*. Among the ‘means and ends’, the *sādhana-sādhya* in the various *artha-kāma* pursuits, one of the means, they say, is *dharma*. They say that you should continue your pursuit of *artha* and *kāma*, but be mindful of *dharma*. In doing so, which is the *puruṣārtha*? Is *dharma* the *puruṣārtha*? No, it is not. *Artha* is the *puruṣārtha* and *kāma* is the *puruṣārtha*. You are told to ‘follow’ *dharma* when you pursue *artha* and *kāma*. Therefore, in this approach, *dharma* becomes a subserving *sādhana* for the pursuits of *artha* and *kāma*. To say that you have to follow *dharma* in order to accomplish *artha* and *kāma* is paying lip service to *dharma*.

As I listen to people of different religious persuasions, I find that nobody thinks of *dharma* as a *puruṣārtha*, as an end to be accomplished. Even many Indian spiritual leaders do not seem to understand this. They always say *dharma* has to be followed in order to achieve *artha* and *kāma* and that is why *dharma* is at the beginning of the list. This is not correct.

### ***Dharma is as much a puruṣārtha as artha and kāma***

*Dharma* has as much of a place among the *puruṣārthas* as *artha* and *kāma*, the common ends that human beings want to accomplish. *Dharma* is also an end to be accomplished. That is the reason why we do not look upon saintliness as something that a special person chooses to have or is endowed with. We do not accept that concept.

### ***Ahimsā and Compassion***

In following *dharma*, a number of values and attitudes are listed in our *śāstra* as necessary for a human being. *Ahimsā* is mentioned in the list given in the thirteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* [13-8], *amānitvam adambhitvam ahimsā kṣāntir ārjavam*, absence of conceit, absence of hypocrisy, harmlessness, accommodation, straightforwardness, but *dayā* is not mentioned there. It is mentioned, however, in another verse, *adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānām maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca*, ‘the one who has no hatred or ill-will to any being, the one who has the disposition of a friend, who is compassionate’ [*Bhagavad Gita*, 12-13]. When you look into these three words, *maitraḥ*, *karuṇa*, and *adveṣṭā*, you see their expression in *bhūta-dayā*, compassion for all beings. If you stretch

*ahimsā*, not hurting, it becomes *bhūta-dayā*.

We have always maintained that among the values of *dharma*, *ahimsā* is the most exalted, *ahimsā paramo dharmah*. When you stay with *ahimsā* and do not gloss over it, it becomes *dayā*. When you follow *ahimsā*, compassion, *dayā*, is inevitable because you cannot follow *ahimsā* without being compassionate. If you say *na himse*, “I do not hurt,” it means that you have to have compassion. You can use your will to curb the tendency to hurt. Compassion follows. That is why both Mahāvīra and the Buddha highlighted *ahimsā*. Therefore, *ahimsā* is a *dharma* that occupies the first place.

### ***Compassion and speaking the truth***

We often hear it said that *satyam*, speaking the truth, is very important. Nevertheless, you can speak the truth and make everybody suffer because the truth you speak may be unpleasant. You are honest, but when you begin talking everybody runs away from you because you are so brutally honest. Speaking the truth also implies that you need to be pleasant. *Satyam brūyāt priyam brūyāt na brūyāt satyam apriyam* [*Manu Smṛti*, 4-138], speak the truth, speak what is pleasant, do not speak a truth that is unpleasant. Therefore, do not deceive in order to please, but at the same time, do not tell the truth if it can displease people. Just keep quiet in those instances. This is why we have been given a choice to speak or not to speak.

It is important to learn when not to speak. Knowing when to speak is different. Knowing when not to speak is more important than knowing when to speak because often, when we speak, what we say does not matter at all. When speaking does not matter, not speaking is very important. People think that *satyam* is just speaking the truth, but sometimes this can make everybody suffer, including you. It is an indication that you cannot be kind to yourself. Therefore, it is really compassion that makes you a person who speaks the truth. It is not that non-compassionate people tell lies, but a compassionate person does not need to tell a lie, and does not need to prove himself or herself as a person.

You will find that if you pursue any one value, everything else will follow. These values are like noodles; they always come as a bunch. So by following *ahimsā*, you follow all the values there are, because you cannot follow one without following all the others.

### ***No other puruṣārtha is to be pursued at the cost of dharma***

*Dharma* is something you have to follow, sometimes, even at the cost of *artha* or at the cost of *kāma*. *Dharma*, therefore, becomes an independent end to be achieved. It does not subserve the other ends—it is an independent *puruṣārtha*.

I have heard people saying that if you follow *dharma*, everything else, including *mokṣa*, will take care of itself. It will not take care of itself, but at least you become ready for self-knowledge, which is *mokṣa*, if you follow *dharma*.

### ***Compassion has to be discovered to pursue dharma***

In the matrix of values, compassion, which characterizes saintliness, has got to be acquired. To grow from being a mere survivor, into a contributor necessarily involves becoming a person of compassion. How does that happen? You need to discover compassion by acting it out. An act of compassion can evoke compassion that may be inhibited. An act is always deliberate; it is different from an instinctual or impulsive response, which is more of a reaction. In a deliberate act of compassion, one acts deliberately, as though one has compassion, because one has a value for compassion. Performing an act of compassion will make you compassionate. People would say that an act of compassion is helping somebody who needs help. I think this is a simple human action with a degree of compassion. A true act of compassion is deliberate, such as when you perceive that somebody has done something wrong to you, and yet pray for that person's welfare. If somebody does you a disservice and yet, you reach out, you cross all the borders of anger and hatred and get into a new territory that you are not used to, that is called an act of compassion. There is value for being compassionate in an act of compassion, and if you keep doing it consistently, compassion will be with you.

### ***Compassion, the dynamic form of ānanda, is our very own nature***

Compassion, the dynamic form of *ānanda*, is your very nature. Whether you know it completely or not, you can understand this much—that *ānanda* cannot be anything other than you. There is no object called *ānanda* and there is no place called *ānanda*. There is no person whom you can recognize as *ānanda*. It is not a given time, and it is not an attribute of an object. There is no place, a magic place, where you go to become happy. You can be happy and you can be unhappy anywhere. Still, you do have moments of happiness and, therefore, you can understand that happiness is not anywhere else except centered on you.

### ***We are happy when we are ourselves, when we do not see ourselves as wanting persons***

Some say that happiness is inside you. What does that mean? Is happiness in the mind? If the mind makes you happy, does it mean that when you are sad, there is no mind? Even in having its desires fulfilled, the mind is happy only temporarily. However, whenever you are happy, more often than not, you have not fulfilled any desire. Also, more often than not, you need not fulfill a desire to be happy. So what does this happiness depend upon? It depends upon you. It is not even the condition of the mind. When you do not see yourself as a wanting person, if a situation does not evoke a wanting person, you are happy. It is as simple as that. That is your nature. In fact, you are happy when you are yourself, not when you are what you think you are. That is why self-forgetting becomes so important. When what you think about yourself makes you unhappy, then, self-forgetting makes you happy.

### ***Compassion brings us closer to our true nature***

Since you do not make a complaint that you are happy, but you cannot stand yourself when you are unhappy, we can say that the happy person, the person you love to be is yourself. This logic, born of experience, is called *anubhava-yukti*. Your own experience, *anubhava*, gives you a certain *yukti*, a certain line of reasoning, which helps you understand that you are *ānanda*. Compassion is a dynamic form of *ānanda*, and that is the reason why, when there is compassion,

you are ‘close’ to yourself. That is why it seems to be the most important thing.

***Compassion is the most important value to be cultivated deliberately***

When I look into the system of human values, what stands out for me as a thing to be cultivated deliberately and consciously is compassion. It evokes the bigness in you, the wholeness in you, the love, the giving, and the understanding in you. It is this relatively whole person who can discover that he is the whole. In this discovery there is complete release, *mokṣa*, from the human struggle against a sense of limitation and, therefore, it is the ultimate human end.